

Kathmandu -- It is a great pleasure to be with all of you to observe World AIDS Day 2009, as we join hands around this year's global theme 'Universal Access and Human Rights.' This year the United States Government is also promoting the theme, "Working Together." These themes: Universal Access and Human Rights and Working Together give us important goals toward reducing the transmission and reversing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Nepal, ensuring that every citizen has access to testing and treatment services, and ensuring the rights of people affected by HIV and AIDS to live with dignity and respect.

We do not celebrate World AIDS Day. Instead, we observe World AIDS Day in Nepal and around the world to remind us of the millions of lives affected by HIV since it was first identified almost 30 years ago. HIV has become part of the human experience, either directly or indirectly for every person on the planet. The phrase, "HIV" is almost universally known. The almost universal awareness of HIV is an important reason that HIV is decreasing in prevalence among some populations. People armed with knowledge can better protect themselves and their families from HIV.

World AIDS Day gives us an opportunity to measure our successes and our failures in the fight against HIV/AIDS over the last three decades, and to recommit ourselves to work together to overcome the obstacles and challenges that still stand in the way.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is the largest commitment in history by any nation to combat a single disease. The American people have already provided more than \$25 billion to the fight against global AIDS. Through PEPFAR, the U.S. Government is also the first and largest single contributor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Today, an estimated 4 million individuals in low- and middle – income countries have access to anti-retroviral treatment. More than half of these men, women and children are supported by the American People. In countless communities around the world, through partnerships with the American people, courageous individuals in nations devastated by HIV and AIDS are choosing life, saving the lives of their fellow countrymen and women, and creating hope for a future free of HIV and AIDS.

Here in Nepal, the Government has identified HIV and AIDS as a cross-cutting issue affecting national development. The government has committed to the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals to halt and reverse the spread of the virus by 2015. We are witness today to the impressive commitment of the government at the highest levels to ensuring universal access to services, and to ensuring human rights for people affected by HIV and

AIDS.

The U.S. Government, through the United States Agency for International Development, has supported Nepal's response to the HIV epidemic since 1994. We are pleased to be working together with all partners under the National Action Plan for HIV and AIDS, led by the Government of Nepal. We have helped to build capacity in the government and in non-governmental organizations to design, manage and implement an effective National HIV/AIDS Program. Our activities in prevention, care and support, and in managing the steady supply of testing kits and medicines have benefited thousands of Nepalese citizens around the country.

Our support has been instrumental in reducing the epidemic among some high risk groups, in raising awareness about HIV, and in helping to reduce the terrible stigma and discrimination associated with it. Likewise, the U.S. Government has worked to involve the commercial sector in marketing condoms, and to increase social responsibility for children affected by HIV and AIDS. The results have been truly impressive, and Nepal is beginning to see a downward trend in HIV prevalence among some most-at-risk populations.

Ensuring that numbers of new infections decline is an important way that we monitor the epidemic and know our programs are succeeding. But HIV and AIDS are also about people, and it has been an issue very close to my heart. When I worked in South Africa, I learned about and became involved in a program called "Mothers2Mothers." The goal of the program is to increase voluntary counseling and testing of pregnant women through pairing women who had been through the experience of HIV testing and counseling with new mothers who are facing it for the first time. Those with experience support women who have not been tested to allay their fears and give them hope. While the overall goal is to prevent transmission of the virus to children, the program supports and encourages women to face their challenges and access the help they need.

The United States remains firm in our commitment to turn the tide against HIV and AIDS. And as our commitment goes forward, the United States will support efforts through President Obama's Global Health Initiative to make health systems more responsive to people living with HIV by increasing integration and facilitating their access to health care services, including those for tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and child health, and family planning.

On behalf of the U.S. Government I would like to congratulate all of you for your successes so

far, and wish you continued success in all your efforts. Working together, we have begun to turn the tide against HIV.

Working together we can stop HIV and AIDS in Nepal. HIV can be prevented when people have knowledge to protect themselves and their families. We all must help our brothers and sisters who have HIV and AIDS get testing, treatment and care. Every Nepali deserves a healthy life and to live with dignity and respect.

Thank you.

Randy W. Berry
Chargé d'Affaires
U.S. Embassy, Kathmandu